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faith; for the mind that can honestly believe that the sublimest thing in human history was thus achieved we have only speechless incomprehension. It is as if some children playing in a studio during the artist's absence had left a canvas daubed over with—the Sistine Madonna. The painting of Raphael and the gospel of Jesus were inferribly otherwise given to the world.

CLAYTON R. BOWEN

MEADVILLE THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL

A REFORMER BEFORE THE REFORMATION¹

These two volumes constitute a valuable contribution to the resources available to the English reader for the twilight period of ecclesiastical history antedating the dawn of the Protestant Reformation. They were called forth by the four-hundredth anniversary of the beginning of that great movement. They furnish the first adequate biography in English of one of the most vigorous and interesting figures in the era of preparation, and the only available English translation of his principal writings. The thesis of these volumes, sustained alike in biography and translated works, is that Wessel Gansfort was in every sense of the term a precursor of the religious awakening of the sixteenth century. The first two-thirds of Volume I deals with the biography of Wessel and an estimate of the man. The remainder of Volume I, together with Volume II, is devoted to his chief works.

Many elements combined in the making of this remarkable man. From scholasticism came his love of exact definition, his passion for logical precision. From the mystic piety of an à Kempis and the schools of the Brethren of the Common Life came his deep religious enthusiasms. His humanistic interest and devotion to the sacred languages prepared the way for that interest in the Bible which characterized the Reformation age.

The decay of vital religion in the Netherlands and the corruption of the Renaissance papacy led him to deep searchings of heart and awakened in him a zeal for reform. His mind made up, he spoke it freely and forcibly, sustaining his positions by cold logic and the rapier thrusts of a keen intellect. "Master of Contradictions" he was called by his critics—a tribute indeed to his combative, argumentative spirit.

¹ *Wessel Gansfort, Life and Writings*. By Edward Waite Miller. Principal works translated by Jared Waterbury Scudder. New York: Putnam, 1917. 2 vols. xvi+333 and v+369 pages. \$4.00.

Wessel bore neither the tonsure of the priest nor the cowl of the monk. He was always the scholar, the omnivorous reader of books, the student of philosophy and theology and of the sacred Scriptures. He was a teacher as well as a scholar. The term "Lux Mundi" given him by his reverent disciples testifies to their high regard. Among those who came under the spell of his direct influence were Agricola and Reuchlin, both important figures in the history of German Humanism. Another of his disciples, Honius, was the first to give that interpretation of the Lord's Supper (*est=significat*) which later characterized the eucharistic teaching of the Swiss reformers in distinction from the consubstantiation doctrine of Luther. Our author calls attention to the significant fact that "in those centres where the influence of Wessel and his disciples was strong—the Netherlands, the Palatinate and the northern Swiss cities"—notwithstanding the influence of Luther's personality and doctrine, "when a permanent form of church life and doctrine was to be established, they turned from Luther to the more congenial . . . teaching . . . presented by Wessel and his disciples." The author of this biography unites with Ullmann in regarding Wessel as "one of the principal founders of the Reformed churches." He certainly influenced Œcolampadius, Bucer, and Melancthon. It is significant that most of the thousand pages of literary remains from the pen of Wessel, about one-third of which are here translated from the Latin, were written during the last decade of his career, when he lived a retired life within convent walls in Groningen. Dying in 1489, he left behind him memories and inspirations fruitful in the lives of men destined to be leaders in the revolt of the succeeding century. Open-minded, vigorous in intellect, bold in assertion, lucid in thought, untrammelled by tradition or superstition, evangelical and biblical in spirit, Wessel was at the same time a man of the deepest piety. One cannot read his writings as here presented without the conviction that Wessel was essentially a Protestant as regards both his critical and his constructive ideas. It was inevitable that Rome should look askance at him; that he should suffer petty persecution at the hands of priests and monks. It was equally inevitable that Luther should have said of him, "If I had read his works earlier, my enemies might think that Luther absorbed everything from Wessel, his spirit is so in accord with mine." In his views regarding the Scripture, justification by faith, the church, the sacraments, purgatory, his attitude of mind was kindred to that of the Reformers.

While the authors of these volumes have been confined to three copies of Wessel's Latin works found in American libraries, there is no reason

to think that wider research would modify materially the conclusions here reached as to the man and his work. Of twelve known letters of Wessel, nine are here translated, together with six others written either to or about him. The value of this correspondence is not in its contribution to our knowledge of Wessel's life, but rather in the sidelight thrown upon his teaching. Two of these letters are addressed to nuns. Others discuss the state of the dead, while still others give critical consideration to the doctrine of indulgences. The work on the Eucharist, while devotional in intent, treats of this sacrament as essentially memorial in character and inspirational in purpose. Wessel's doctrine of the Eucharist was essentially the same as that subsequently held by Carlstadt, Zwingli, and Æcolampadius. It ends, as do most of his argumentative works, with a series of propositions embodying his views. The *Farrago*, or *Miscellanies*, consists of a number of writings of Wessel on "Providence," the "Incarnation and Passion," the "Dignity and Power of the Church," "Penance," the "Communion of Saints," and "Purgatory." These works, gathered by Wessel's friends, were submitted to Luther's judgment, and upon his advocacy were published in 1521, and thereafter frequently. The views here expressed were evangelical.

The work before us also contains, in translation, biographical sketches by Hardenberg and Geldenhauer, who wrote at a time when many still lived who had known Wessel. A critical appendix calls attention to important variations in the three texts employed as a basis for this translation. The work before us is printed in large, clear type, and is unusually well indexed and generously illustrated with pictures of Wessel, scenes from ancient Groningen, and illuminated title-pages from his works.

The work as a whole is most creditable both to its authors and to the American Society of Church History, among whose *Papers* it appears as Special Volumes Nos. I and II. Students of the pre-Reformation and Reformation period will find here much that is informing and inspiring.

HENRY HAMMERSLEY WALKER

CHICAGO THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

A STUDY ON THE PATRIMONY OF THE ROMAN CHURCH¹

The author, Mr. Edward Spearing, was killed in action, September 11, 1916, at the age of twenty-six. The material collected by him during 1912-13 in pursuit of a study on the patrimony during the first

¹ *The Patrimony of the Roman Church in the Time of Gregory the Great*. By Edward Spearing. Cambridge: University Press, 1918. xix+147 pages. \$2.00.